

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6324

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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, SA, JO, SY, US

SUBJECT: CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS ON SAUDI LETTER OF OFFER

REF: STATE 039732

FOLLOWING INFORMATION ON SAUDI BRIGADE IN SYRIA IS
SUBMITTED IN RESPONSE TO REFTEL:

A. STRENGTH AND LOCATION.

SAUDI BRIGADE IS BELIEVED TO NUMBER BETWEEN
4500 AND 5000. IT IS LOCATED AT KISWEH (3321N-3614E)
ABOUT 13 KILOMETERS SOUTH OF DAMASCUS ON THE AMMAN
HIGHWAY. IT IS CO-LOCATED WITH THE SYRIAN 1ST ARMORED
DIVISION. KISWEH IS A RESERVE CAMP AND TO THE BEST
OF OUR KNOWLEDGE THERE ARE NO SAUDIS IN FORWARD
POSITIONS ON GOLAN. BRIGADE COMMANDER IS MAJ GEN
MUHAMMED AHMAD BUDAYRAH (POSSIBLY BUDAIR) WHO IS
A GRADUATE OF THE US ARMY COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF
COLLEGE AT FORT LEAVENWORTH (1958) AND THE US ARMY
INFANTRY SCHOOL AT FORT BENNING, GEORGIA.

B. COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS.

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IN NOVEMBER 1975, BUDAYRAH TOLD DATT THAT HIS BRIGADE HAD AN INDEPENDENT STATUS AND OPERATED DIRECTLY UNDER SYRIAN ARMED FORCES HEADQUARTERS. IN OTHER WORDS, IT WAS NOT ATTACHED OR SUBORDINATED TO A SYRIAN TACTICAL UNIT AT THAT TIME. WE DO NOT THINK THE SITUATION HAS CHANGED. BUDAYRAH DID SAY THAT IN THE OCTOBER WAR THE SAUDI BRIGADE WAS ATTACHED TO A SYRIAN DIVISION. ALSO IN NOVEMBER ANOTHER SAUDI GENERAL TOLD DATT THAT THE DIVISION TO WHICH THE SAUDIS WERE ATTACHED IN 1973 WAS THE SYRIAN SEVENTH WHICH WAS THEN, AND IS NOW, A FRONT LINE UNIT RESPONSIBLE FOR APPROXIMATELY THE NORTHWESTERN THIRD OF THE GOLAN FRONT.

C. ORDER OF BATTLE.

THE BRIGADE IS BELIEVED TO CONSIST OF AN ARMORED CAR BATTALION, A PARACHUTE BATTALION, TWO INFANTRY BATTALIONS, AN ARTILLERY UNIT (SIZE UNKNOWN) AND VARIOUS HEADQUARTERS AND SUPPORT UNITS. ITS MORALE APPEARS TO BE GOOD AND WE UNDERSTAND THAT, IN GENERAL, SAUDIS LIKE DUTY IN SYRIA. IN APPEARANCE AND GENERAL DEPORTMENT THEY ARE SHARPER THAN THEIR SYRIAN COUNTERPARTS.

D. EQUIPMENT.

BRIGADE IS, IN GENERAL, EQUIPPED WITH US MANUFACTURED EQUIPMENT. ITS EQUIPMENT INCLUDES US 2 1/2, 3/4 AND 1/4 TON MILITARY TRUCKS AND 5000 GALLON FUEL TANKERS. THEY ALSO POSSESS US 105MM HOWITZERS AND 106MM RIFLES. ALL OF THEIR RADIO EQUIPMENT IS OF US MANUFACTURE AND INCLUDES THE VRC 12 SERIES VEHICULAR MOUNTED RADIO AND THE PRC-77 PORTABLE RADIO. EQUIPMENT OF FOREIGN ORIGIN INCLUDES THE GERMAN G-3 RIFLE (AT LEAST SOME OF WHICH MAY HAVE BEEN MANUFACTURED AT AL-KHARJ) AND FRENCH PANHARD ARMORED CARS OF WHICH THERE ARE BELIEVED TO BE ABOUT 50 IN SYRIA. THERE ARE ALSO SOME QUARTER TON TRUCKS IN THE SAUDI BRIGADE WHICH ARE OF WESTERN

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EUROPEAN ORIGIN. TOTAL NUMBER OF SAUDI VEHICLES IN SYRIA IS ABOUT 1200 AND IN SHARP CONTRAST TO SYRIAN TRUCKS THEY APPEAR WELL MAINTAINED.

E. RESUPPLY.

SAUDIS ARE IN THE MAIN RESUPPLIED BY AIR FROM SAUDI ARABIA. FOR THIS THEY USE C-130 AIRCRAFT.

F. PAKISTANIS.

THERE ARE ABOUT 30 PAKISTANI MILITARY MEDICAL
PERSONNEL ATTACHED TO THE SAUDI BRIGADE.

G. POSSIBLE NEW DEVELOPMENTS.

DATT HAS AN UNCONFIRMED REPORT FROM A GOOD
SOURCE THAT THE SAUDIS MAY BE PLANNING TO REINFORCE
THEIR BRIGADE WITH A UNIT OF FRENCH AMX-30 TANKS
NOW LOCATED AT TOBUK. WE HAVE NO DETAILS.

H. SHORTCOMINGS.

BUDAYRAH HAS COMPLAINED TO DATT THAT HE HAS
INADEQUATE ARTILLERY AND ANTI-TANK WEAPONRY FOR HIS
MISSION IN SYRIA. HE WOULD LIKE TO GET US M-39, 155MM
SELF-PROPELLED HOWITZERS AND TOW MISSILE LAUNCHERS FOR
ANTI-TANK DEFENSE. HE SAID THAT HE WAS NOT PARTICULARLY
INTERESTED IN OBTAINING THE M-113 APC SINCE
HE DID NOT THINK THEY WERE WELL SUITED TO HIS MISSION
IN SYRIA.

I. RELATIONS WITH RUSSIANS.

APPARENTLY SAUDI OFFICERS ARE ACQUAINTED WITH
SOME OF THE RUSSIAN MILITARY WHO ADVISE THE SYRIANS.
HOWEVER, A SAUDI GENERAL TOLD DATT THAT THEY HAVE NO
OFFICIAL ROLE AS FAR AS SAUDIS ARE CONCERNED.

J. MISSION AND TACTICAL PLANNING.

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WE KNOW VERY LITTLE ABOUT THIS. BUDAYRAH IMPRESSES
AS BEING QUITE PROFESSIONAL AND WE ASSUME THAT HE HAS
DEVELOPED CONTINGENCY PLANS, AS A MINIMUM FOR THE
PROTECTION OF HIS OWN UNIT, AS ANY GOOD COMMANDER WOULD.
SYRIANS, WE ASSUME, MUST HAVE CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR
EMPLOYMENT OF SAUDIS IN EVENT OF WAR. BUT WHERE
AND HOW WE DON'T KNOW. HOWEVER, THE FACT THAT THE
BRIGADE WAS AT ONE TIME ATTACHED TO THE SYRIAN
SEVENTH DIVISION MAY BE A CLUE AS IS THEIR LOCATION
AT KISWEH WITH SYRIAN 1ST ARMORED. TO THE BEST OF
OUR KNOWLEDGE, SAUDIS AND SYRIANS DO NOT CONDUCT
JOINT EXERCISES (THE EXERCISE LAST FALL WAS APPARENTLY
STRICTLY A SAUDI SHOW: SEE USDAO DAMASCUS MESSAGES 390/031329Z
NOV 75, 392/051155Z NOV 75, & 396/071327Z NOV 75 - ALL SENT

STATE) AND WHEN THE 1ST ARMORED MOVED NORTH TO THE IRAQI BORDER
LAST SPRING THE SAUDIS STAYED PUT AT KISWEH. IT SEEMS REASONABLE
TO US TO ASSUME THAT BEFORE THE COMMANDER HERE COULD
COMMIT HIS BRIGADE TO COMBAT HE WOULD HAVE TO RECEIVE
POLITICAL CLEARANCE FROM RIYADH.

K. MISCELLANEOUS.

WE HEAR OCCASIONAL RUMORS OF DIFFICULTIES
BETWEEN SAUDIS AND SYRIANS. FOR EXAMPLE, WE
WERE TOLD THAT A COUPLE OF MONTHS AGO THAT A
GROUP OF RIFA'T AL-ASAD'S PRESIDENTIAL GUARD UNIT
HAS STOLEN A NUMBER OF CIVILIAN CARS BELONGING TO
SAUDI OFFICERS. BUT WE CANNOT CONFIRM THIS AND IN
GENERAL WE BELIEVE RELATIONSHIPS ARE GOOD ALTHOUGH
WE RARELY, IF EVER, SEE SAUDI AND SYRIAN SOLDIERS
OPENLY ASSOCIATING. SYRIAN MERCHANTS ARE DELIGHTED
TO HAVE SAUDIS HERE SINCE THEY ARE FREE SPENDERS.
MURPHY

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